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ABSTRACT

The upcoming Bureau of the Census document titled, "The Survey of Institutionalized Persons" will provide complete information and data on long-term institutional care. Because this document provides data basically devoid of context, this discussion paper presents an ethnology of a total institution. In it, the author conveys his impressions and observations formed during a guided tour of this institution which is simply labeled, "Palm Breeze". Although the grounds of the institution are aesthetically beautiful with green lush gardens, there are no people on the grounds. The people are inside the buildings exhibiting varying degrees of inactivity. There is a special language at Palm Breeze, shared by the inmates, but incomprehensible to nurses and guards. Power relationships are very clear at this institution. Actions are determined according to what is allowed, and one of the things seemingly not allowed is English. Ways of discouraging its use include drugs and a day structured to yank people away from any situation in which English could be employed, to name but two. The children's wards and the women's wards are visited, and each is replete with its individual horrors. The children are over drugged, under stimulated and forgotten. In the women's wards, women can be found drinking from unflushed toilets. The reason for this is that the water fountains are broken and some women crawl rather than walk. Palm Breeze is an inhuman and brutal institution. Its socialization is fast and efficient. It is a model for changing attitudes, behavior, and personality. (Author/AM)

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INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON POVERTY DISCUSSION PAPERS

The Uncounted Poor: An Ethnological Excursion to an Institution

William Roth

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON

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William Roth

February 1977

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ABSTRACT

Quite shortly the "Survey of Institutionalized Persons" will be released by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. This data file will sample and allow for analysis of a new sort of poverty. It is a poverty not only of wealth, not only of power, but of dignity and freedom itself. In many ways, as hopefully will be revealed in what follows, institutions are best conceived of as different cultures. As such, the use of these data files should be undertaken with an awareness that one is, in fact, dealing with a different culture. Recently I took a trip to a common sort of large institution--call it Palm Breeze. What I saw challenged at least my common sense understanding of people and of society. There is reason to suspect that it may challenge the interpretation of and the very use of the data files on institutions.

The "Survey of Institutionalized Persons," authorized by Title 42, Section 2825 of the U.S. Code, is being conducted to "obtain a complete picture of long-term institutional care." Its coverage of the issues is impressive: use of institutional services, institutional finances, relationships between institutions and government agencies, impact of institutionalization on family, physical and social environment of the residents, and incidence of institutionalization among various socioeconomic groups.

The introduction to the survey states:

> By addressing these issues and others the sponsor will have an understanding of the administrative and policy difficulties of the institution, the well-being of the institutionalized population, and the amount of support (financial and personal) provided by the families of the residents.
>
> This survey is particularly important because it will provide current information on issues on which little data is available but which affect a number of government programs and policies.

The survey will provide long-needed "information" and "data." But it would be sad if data was severed from theoretical context, if information we quartered from insight. The theoretical context and insight demand an ethnological comprehension of these institutions, a comprehension which must logically preceed any meaningful use of facts. What follows can be regarded as a first stage in such an ethnology of institutions or, more abruptly, the context which is a necessary prolegomena to the use of any data file, in specific, the "Survey of Institutionalized Persons."

Palm Breeze is idyllic. Idyllic isn't a metaphor. The grounds are large and green. The buildings are isolated dense red brick clusters, looking like meat in a supermarket displayed against the green grass. Palm Breeze

is a garden city. I'm sleepy enough to want to stretch out on the grass and sleep. I'm in paradise in a special place that few people know exist, and it is just incredible. It is just beautiful. It is just green. And the grass is warm. This is the first day of Spring. Stretch out and dream.

Wake up, you're here on business.

Then in you go into a large brick building with a central hall with confused corridors leading away. The colors outside are brick and red and inside they are grey. Inside there are people; and outside, along the walkways under the trees, beneath the sun, there are no people.

I choose a hall. I walk down it looking from side to side and reach the end and sit down around a large table. I'm feeling insecure; I don't have a notarized letter showing my credentials and legitimizing my presence. It's still early and people start drifting into the room, which turns out to be a room where you meet before starting the day's work. The people there assume that I am a new worker. When I say that I'm not, people outbid each other with friendliness and offer to show me around into their days. One man offers a meeting. Another young man offers a different meeting, and then a visit to a ward...within ten minutes, ten different days are offered. The people are very young, all of them, very friendly, very enthusiastic. They joke over coffee; they welcome an outsider.

This is the Palm Breeze about which I've read? Impossible. With people like this running Palm Breeze, what is there to be worried about.

The social service unit is a new unit. Its job is to place people from Palm Breeze into the outside world. The social service section has an astonishingly high success rate. It's about 50 percent. It takes a bit till it finally occurs to me to ask what percentage of the Palm Breeze

population social service tries to place. Answer: less than one-half percent.

Now, needless to say, the lives of that one-half percent are not going to be the best of all possible lives. On the other hand, we can probably understand it because they live as our neighbors. The people in this unit are very proud and have every right to be because of the chance that they are giving some of the residents of Palm Breeze.

What about the other 99 1/2 percent?

This is an "elite" section. If I were cynical about people, which I am, I would say that people whose jobs allow them pride can afford to be human.

All these people are extending themselves toward me, welcoming me, wanting to show me. One of these human beings around a round table with coffee and doughnuts introduces herself as Mary. And of the many days offered me, I choose Mary's day.

Mary is totally without pretension, direct, simple, sensuous, and loving. Her gestures quite naturally include touching me. They resonate back to a time in my life when I was a playful child. I would have said at the beginning that she had come from an entirely different culture. It turns out that she had. Leaving the building, she says to me, "You know, I used to be a patient here." I don't really believe her. It took the experience of a whole day reflected on to comprehend her saying, "you know, I used to be a patient here."

Mary is bilingual. She is able to speak the English that we all speak, an English of syntax and semantics and phonemics, an English of sound and gesture, an English of intention and attention.

Mary also speaks a different language. A direct language of simplicity and warmth. A language of hugs--hugs above all--a language of tone, a language which evokes in me memories of things which I have cast from myself.

Later I will understand that this language is one of the few inalienable rights of the citizens of Palm Breeze. It is a language much like that of many other poor people, like that of the residents of Brazil's northeastern Sertao in the films of Glauber Rocha. It is a language of resignation, incomprehensible to nurses and guards. Its existence is predicated on the political structure of Palm Breeze, for Palm Breeze is what is called in the trade a "total institution." Power relationships are very clear here. Actions are determined according to what is allowed, and one of the things seemingly not allowed is English. Ways of discouraging its use include drugs and a day structured to yank people from any situation in which English could be employed, to name but two.

But there is something else. Maybe we more normal citizens of a more normal world, an intelligent world, a benign world, the sane world--have been systematically socialized so that we do not use that language. Maybe we possess an innate capability for many languages and out of this array of potentialities our society socializes us into the more specialized language, English. In public we seldom use the language of Palm Breeze. In our private lives, we sometimes do--as young children, in our more loving moments with our children, on the sly in some of the very private parts of our lives. We have been trained out of it for our public lives and maybe even more than we like to think for our private lives. It is a language of lovemaking without seduction.

But Mary is bilingual. She speaks both Palm Breeze and English. Throughout the day she interprets Palm Breeze--I use the word now to refer not only to the institution, but also to its language, customs and culture--to me. I am a stranger from a middle-class academic world which speaks languages which frequently seem designed to preclude warmth and directness even more than our more usual forms of English.

Without Mary I would have never understood what was happening at Palm Breeze. The only things I would have seen were the kinds of things you read about in our English language newspapers, which are important--changes at Palm Breeze are going to have to come from native speakers of English--but the biggest thing at Palm Breeze is not that women drink from toilets full of feces.

I follow Mary and another woman, Pauline, outside where it is sunny and breezy and green. Mary tosses me a verbal hug. Pauline has only been working at Palm Breeze for three weeks. She is still learning her job. Mary hasn't been working there that long either, but although she may be still learning her job, she has the advantage of knowing Palm Breeze.

The spaces between the buildings are even larger than I have remembered them. Pauline and Mary have to check the files of some residents in a unit for children. This unit is a show-off place. Pauline and Mary feel proud in showing it to me. We take a car to it. It is a new sparkling building, brilliantly planned, as is most of Palm Breeze. There are no children playing on the lawn, which is big, beautiful and empty.

In we go. Pauline and Mary have work to do, records to check, files to pull. They leave me on my own. Big brother, there are television sets everywhere. I soon learn that this television watching or nonwatching

is, next to sleeping, the chief out-of-class thing that children do at Palm Breeze. The most watched program is Sesame Street.

There have in recent years been two astounding advances in pacification at institutions like Palm Breeze. Call them the twin "T"s, television and Thorazine. (If not Thorazine, then a drug like it.) Children at Palm Breeze and their older brothers and sisters are junkies. And when television gets larger and three dimensionally holographic, they will be TV junkies as well. Right now television is too small. I follow the trail of television sets, look up from the last television and I am in a classroom, taught by a woman named Greta. Greta's surname is beside the point, because it is soon to be changed, because Greta is soon to get married in a ceremony to which the children in the class are invited. Greta is a very warm human teacher. As I walk into the classroom, the children hug me. I carry a bag with me and the children try to open it. I try to be an inconspicuous observer, quite possible in most situations, but impossible in a situation where those observed refuse to be nice and not notice your presence.

About a third of the children in the class have Downs Syndrome or Mongolism--take your pick, we have no human word for it--others are retarded and/or malformed in other ways. Others, to a lay person such as me, should not be there. It must have taken very acute powers of diagnosis to decide that they should be at Palm Breeze. I stand in awe.

Greta's children have very short attention spans; lesson plans are broken up into five-minute intervals. Short attention span equals short lesson plan. Fine equation.

The current lesson plan is on time telling. Greta has some magnetic clock hands in a large metal circle of numbers. She alters them and asks

the class what time it is. Alternatively she says a hypothetical time and asks the child to move the hands to that time. Invariably, the children first try to move the hands on the regular clock in the room and Greta has to say "No. We're moving the hands on this clock." She says a time and children look up at the real clock on the wall and guess and Greta says "No. We're telling time from this clock."

Piaget would have it that these children have preoperational cognitive structures. They are unable to pretend. In the context of Piaget's experiments, such thought seems primitive and unfortunate. But in the context of reality, reality asserts its own context, and there is something admirable about the obstinate imminence of minds that will not make believe when they are not in a make believe situation. The ability to pretend probably involves the ability to play in general, and children at Palm Breeze do not play.

Without play, the obstinacy of reality is the only thing that makes sense. Five real clock minutes and this fragment of lesson is over.

Some of the children have followed the lesson. Most have not. And some were unaware of its existence. The teaching assistant spends her time replacing children into their chairs.

The next lesson game is letter bingo. Those who win, win a lollipop. In more reflective, logical moods, I do not like behavior modification. But maybe you deny a child humanity in places like Palm Breeze in order that he may obtain it later.

The class is over. The teacher asks one of the children to go to her pocketbook and retrieve her cigarettes. No problem. These children know every inch of their classroom. They know exactly where the cigarettes

are in the pocketbook and exactly where the pocketbook is in her desk. So cigarettes are retrived and nothing else is disturbed.

The teacher lights up, children hug her on the way out, and the teacher and I are about to talk. I look around the room. It is elaborately decorated with simple cut-out pictures, drawn by the teacher. They change according to the context. Like a word, a child cannot be thought about without the context of his existential situation. Thought of without context, a child with Downs Syndrome is a clinical being defined by that shred of context "possession of a syndrome." The child is no human being. When we think of our brothers and sisters, they are brothers and sisters precisely because they exist in situations; times and histories, which are our situations, times and histories. But it is hard to think of a human being in an institution as a human being, which is one thing that institutions are about--because in institutions, the context is the institution, a context which tries to wall out empathy as it walls in people.

Greta comes over and we talk. Greta says that she will not be staying after that year because she is getting married and having a family of her own. In class she is much more than a teacher. The class is her family. She is a mother, not only in the children's eyes, but that is the way that she thinks of herself.

What happens in the classroom is not just class. It is family; family right here in the middle of Palm Breeze; family with warmth and love; family. Just great.

No, not great. Because Greta Smith is to become Greta Jones. She will leave her family of ten children at Palm Breeze and then start a

family of her own. And children, who psychologists tell us, have as their most constant and dreaded fear that they will be left, will be orphans for a second time. But you have to look for somebody else to blame, because Greta is not the person.

And again, not great. Because I talk to Greta about what the children do during the rest of the day when they are not in her classroom.

She says, glancing out the door, "They're eating lunch now, but it's in a giant cafeteria, you know, row upon row."

"And what do they do after lunch?"

"They sit and watch television."

"They don't play with each other, they don't go outside?"

"No," Greta states, "The outside is for you to look at when you come in, it's not for the children. If they go outside, they go out usually into playpens."

And then I ask, "What happens during the rest of the day?"

"The kids eat dinner, then they sit..."

"They what?"

"They sit."

"Oh," I say.

"Then they go to bed," concludes Greta, concluding a day in the life of a child at Palm Breeze.

That's interesting. I think. The only life which we would recognize the only life as speaking people, as playing people, as people interacting with other people, the only life in something resembling our families, the only life which has any growth to it, occurs right here in the context of this classroom.

Soon she says, "I try to make this class as much like a family as possible, although I know when they leave this class that family is destroyed. Everyday is starting over again. It seems like they have forgotten what it is like to be in a family situation. One of the things that makes me hopeful is that they're all eager to come into class."

I wonder if the children are bounding into class or bounding away from something else.

Mary, Pauline and I go to the car. Mary doesn't understand why it took an hour until she was given the files. We drive from the children's building to a grown-up building. Mary is very proud of the children's building. It is new. I wonder what kind of children's building there was when she was at Palm Breeze. As for the building we are going to, there is no cause for wonder as Mary was in the very same building herself.

We leave the car and enter the building, which has a big capital letter on it, like every building at Palm Breeze. I don't remember the letter now. But it is a building in which young women are kept. The nurse in charge is a fearful creature. Maybe she isn't a nurse, maybe she's a supervisor, maybe she's an administrator. Anyone without compassion would call her a bitch. She isn't about to let me see the doctor in charge. So I introduce myself as "Dr. William Roth, I have an appointment with Dr. David Boswell." She zips in to see the doctor, zips out to tell us that he'll be free in ten minutes. There's a kind of bench against the wall and we sit down. To our right is a front office with that woman in it. To our left is the locked door. Behind us is a door

leading outside which turns out is locked to the inside. That's a little bit odd for me. I'm used to having doors locked to the outside which can be opened from the inside. The lock on this door is rigged just the other way. In front of us is a staircase.

So much for the static architecture. Within the following ten minutes waiting for the doctor, the following:

Young women, looking older than they are, are clothed to various degrees in bizarre outfits. Some walk up the stairs. Some walk down the stairs. Some crawl up the stairs. Some crawl down the stairs. Some just sit. I, positioned very compactly on the bench, legs crossed, am far from being the most comfortable of creatures.

The door opens behind us and in come two women, ambassadors from the straight world. The women do not enter the space fully; they keep back against the door. A woman springs out to meet them. Apparently there is some relationship. Maybe they are sisters, although if they are, they have denied any sisterhood. They are dressed to the teeth, which is not to say that they are expensively dressed, but that they are elaborately dressed, which is to say that the way they are dressed is deliberate, not a matter of how they would dress any day. They are kind of dressed for a Friday night, but they are not smiling. They feel awkward and I understand that. I'm feeling awkward too. They have defended themselves against their awkwardness. They have defined themselves against the Palm Breeze residents by their dress. By their clothes they assure themselves that they are different from the Palm Breeze residents. Entirely understandable, entirely natural, so what else is new? They elaborately ignore everything that is happening, talking

only to the woman who they have come to see. It might be more accurate to call that woman a girl, which is how they see her and how she sees herself. As quickly as possible they get her out. They make believe that she is the only one who exists, that her environment is not hers. They refuse to see her in context and snap her up as quickly as possible. Palm Breeze and the hundreds of Palm Breezes don't exist for us because we don't know about them—off in the beautiful country look lovely from the outside. But even those few of us who do have a chance to go there, like the two sisters protect themselves and deny Palm Breeze's existence even as they stick their heads in the door.

Pauline is very uncomfortable, like me. It is the first time she has been in a building as bad as this one is. Like me, except it's not like me, it's part of her job to be here, and she'll be back. Physically, I'll leave Palm Breeze and Pauline will stay there. How is she going to relate to the people in this ward in other situations yet more disturbing? This upwardly mobile young woman does not realize what is happening, so what will become of her in five years. Will she remain the human being she is now, or will she turn her back on her humanity and on the humanity of the people at Palm Breeze as she travels her career course through Palm Breeze. From the point of view of sociology, she isn't very secure. She's young, she's a woman, she's black, she has a slender education and lack of confidence in her competence for her job. She has only had her job for a short time. The question is, what will she do about all these sociological insecurities. Callousness is one remedy, and in Pauline's case it would be entirely understandable. We have not only

created our Palm Breezes, we have staffed them with citizens marginal to our own society. We solve two problems at one blow, the problem of the citizens of Palm Breeze, the problem of what to do with people marginal to our society. We put them together and don't really care what happens, as long as we don't hear about it. Pauline is institutionalized even as are the residents at Palm Breeze. She will develop her own ways of response to this institutionalization.

So start off with the asylum at Charenton in "Marat Sade." Start off with the film "Titticut Follies." Remember another film, "The Snake Pit." There are some bases you can touch, so touch them, and then come enter into the wards which make the films into cartoons.

Pauline is squirming about her future. More of a coward, I squirm about the present, and Mary...

It so happens that the building we are in is the building in which Mary had lived five of her years. By reputation it is one of the worst buildings at Palm Breeze. It is a building where you are sent for violence and antisocial behavior among other reasons. Mary was neither violent nor antisocial--despite the many years she had spent at Palm Breeze. Palm Breeze considering her such showed its own unfitness as human society. And what do we say about a society like our own which throws up its Palm Breezes?

Mary, as she was to tell me later, had felt deeply seeing old friends and coming back to a building which had hurt her.

In a place like Palm Breeze everybody hugs you. It is natural to take this personally--to think that you are hugged because you are you. Soon we throw up defenses against such personal interpretations, and we

start to think that we are hugged because we are messenger-angels from an outside heaven. Sociology replaces psychology, which in turn has replaced humanness and we are comforted by the abstraction. But in fact these interpretations are untrue. Mary is hugged as much as Pauline is hugged and as much as I am hugged. The only interpretation, then, is a human one, hugging being part of Palm Breeze language. Mary answers in Palm Breeze, returning hug for hug, slapping the hand that goes after her watch (but always slapping toward her, never rejecting the people whom hands are always connected to). Mary in short responds appropriately to a language which is threatening to me. In so doing she makes Palm Breeze language and society comprehensible to me.

So gradually I lose my fear of a language I don't understand. Gradually I learn if not to speak it, to recognize it, and in learning the language, or at least a recognition of its being spoken, learn the humanities of its speakers. Do those who run Palm Breeze understand this language?

But Mary interprets the language of Palm Breeze. It is easy to learn from watching her, at least the rudiments of that language, the way to lift someone's hands from you to let someone else hug you. I'm not a particularly tolerant person, but I learn within minutes that as bizarre as they look, the people around me are that, people. They are human beings with their own vices and virtues. But they are human beings who have been socialized by Palm Breeze. And then I grow mad at a system which has as its input the children whom I have seen, lively children so obviously human, who enjoy life; I get mad that these children

grew up into the sort of adults in front of me, adults who speak in tongues, women who sit in chairs all day long rocking back and forth, people docile and submissive, poorly taken care of physically, and whose minds have been warped and rotted far past the initial infirmity which doubtless most of them have had coming into Palm Breeze.

Dr. Boswell is ready now. He takes out his key and he opens the door to our left. We enter and about ten young women contact us. Sexuality hangs heavy and you don't know quite what to do with it. The bare room has about 35 chairs arranged in a circle. I don't know what the women who came up to us were doing before we entered, but those who have not come to greet us don't seem to be doing much. The room is empty enough and looks as though it should echo, but it doesn't. The chairs are simple fiberglass and steel. Indestructible. Ten of the women are sitting like catatonics.

I ask, "Do you have many catatonics here?"

Boswell laughs, "These women aren't catatonics. They just learn that if you're going to sit in a chair all day, the best way of doing that is to sit with your legs all scrunched up. It takes less energy and is much more efficient."

Think of R.D. Laing's analysis of schizophrenic language as the language appropriate to describing a schizophrenic's condition. I am in another culture here. It occurs to me that the actions, language and customs are best understood not as warped, or primitive, but rather as rational expressions of the existential conditions which have created that culture. The action of the inhabitants of Palm Breeze are entirely appropriate and rational, to the point of catatonia to an atmosphere in which one is drugged and constrained to doing nothing. These women

are masters of nothing. They are existential equivalents of the philosopher, Stirner, who a century ago meditated on the utility of action. His first meditation led him to stop writing, his second to stop teaching, his third to stop talking, and after awhile he was sitting like a catatonic, like these patients, or residents, or citizens. But we can assume that he got to that position by intellect, consciousness, and choice. This intellectual path is open to few of us. Most of us do as our society prescribes. The inhabitants of Palm Breeze are no exception. They have not arrived at catatonia through consciousness. Their society prescribes nothingness, and they have become masters of it.

This is the most horrible thing I see at Palm Breeze. Because, remember, the children at Palm Breeze are anything but inactive. Say what you want about hyper or inappropriate activity, it is activity which differentiates living human beings from their surroundings. We have a word for people who are inactive. We call them "vegetables." The word is so dehumanizing and degrading that its use shows us how appalled we feel at inactivity. Inactivity at Palm Breeze is conditioned by the society of Palm Breeze.

The situation at Palm Breeze is essentially dehumanizing, brutalizing, and objectifying, and it is the situation that we should talk about and not about the isolated conditions of those who have grown up in the situation. For to separate these people from their context would be as unjust of us as it is unjust of Palm Breeze to systematically separate them from any human context. If we use the label "vegetable" we only have a right to use it in considering existence in an environment.

In a situation of war for instance, there are many inactive human beings, but a study of these isolated human beings apart from that situation

which has killed them, we should call necrophilia. What we should be thinking about is the situation which has thrown up the war which has thrown up the corpses. We must bring to any people a context, particularly if one of our intentions is change.

And it may be well to consider in turn, the societal context of Palm Breeze before we pass the blame off on sadistic guards.

So my anger and repulsion at the women in Palm Breeze transforms itself into an anger at Palm Breeze and in turn it does not take very long to realize that that anger is ill-directed, and that I have to consider the relationship of Palm Breeze to our own society to understand it and the people who live there.

"Don't play with the Jones boy," our parents told us, "he is a bad influence". We learn not to play with the Jones boy. We may be afraid of catching blackness, so the black is put in a ghetto where he will not infect us. We are afraid of catching mental illness, so those we attach that label to are kept at a safe distance. We are afraid that old age may sneak in through the back door so we close the back door on it. We are afraid of our neighbors and they of us, so we close the door, lock it, turn on the television and finally think that we feel safe. We are afraid of impurities in our food, so we eat organically. We are afraid of dirt, so we shower to a degree that most dermatologists would say is harmful to our skin. The germ theory has run wild. (There was a social need for it.) We protect our bodies in fear of our futures and our past, and live in perpetual fear of the Other, who in the final analysis, as the Rolling Stones say, is "you and me."

Disabled and retarded children bear an uncanny resemblance to normal children. It takes a trained eye indeed to distinguish babies one from the other, and as surely as we came from the same place as the at Palm Breeze, we shall return to it. We shall become senile, bedridden, and finally we shall die. Our origins and destinies are shared with the inhabitants of Palm Breeze. What distinguishes us from the people at Palm Breeze, and to be sure it is an important distinction, a distinction which we stress at all costs, is our present. Like the two women dressed to the teeth we insist on it.

So we share a past and a future with Palm Breeze, and therein lies the awkwardness. For sharing that past and that future it is important for us to lose our memory so that we may draw distinctions between us and Palm Breeze. Therefore we must separate Palm Breeze from ourselves. We consider its residents yet more different from us than they are and in ways different from us that they are not. We put them far away. We turn them into catatonics. We dose them with Thorazine. We feel awkward when ten of them hug us. Did we not have to cast them from us, we would realize that we share something very fundamental with the residents of Palm Breeze. We share a common humanity. It's all very simple. No? We leave the ward and Dr. Boswell closes the door and locks it behind us.

There's a special new experiment down the hall. Four people have been allowed to be by themselves in a room previously reserved for solitary confinement. (Mary had spent many months there.) There is no attendant, although someone needs help badly. These four people are under the power of someone not there. We leave and go up the stairs into the next ward.

This ward is for dangerous violent patients. I don't see any violence, on the part of the patients anyway. Although if I were an inhabitant of Palm Breeze and had somehow escaped my conditioning to nothingness, somehow kept my sanity, somehow was able to see through a night of drugs, I probably would be dangerous. Maybe that's what made Mary dangerous enough to be put in that building.

The ways of handling the danger of a Palm Breeze inhabitant have transformed what were once clearly violent acts, such as hitting and lobotomies into acts which are, according to the misguided humanism of that place, entirely humane. Take drugs; drugs are used not only at Palm Breeze, they are used at most institutions where you never would expect them, at reform schools, at some foundling homes. Now they are even starting to make their way into our everyday schools, with Ritalin and the amphetamines used for a condition which we label hyperactivity. But there is a difference between drugs which act on the mind and drugs which act somatically or on foreign invaders. But we don't make that distinction. And quite logically so, because we regard the minds of the people at Palm Breeze having been invaded by some sort of bacterium, rickettsae, or virus. Our use of drugs with these people is predicated on objectification. We feel that they have caught something and we're helping to cure them. Our treatment of Palm Breeze residents is predicated on their having been invaded in the same way that we fear that we may be invaded, and the use of a drug shows the ultimate lack of concern because with this drug we can pretend that we are wiping out the germ of disease, and their silence, quite natural after having taken a major tranquilizer, does not tell us otherwise. They no longer bother us.

Drugs like Thorazine and Ritalin are not the most dangerous of drugs and they are not habit forming. Except they are habit forming when you have somebody giving them to you four times a day. Then the habit is formed quite firmly from the outside where habits are initially formed.

On our way out, I see a woman who's been lying on the floor longer than anyone can remember. And no one is able to talk to her. She lies there writhing. Laing speaks about the therapist's mission for schizophrenics--to aid the progress of the trip toward its conclusion of rebirth. This woman is not going to have a rebirth. So what do you do about her? Who knows what she's feeling? Maybe she's feeling bliss, as doubtful as that seems. On the other hand, it's possible that she's feeling perpetual hell. We'll never know. She lies very still, pressed naked against the floor. She cannot commit suicide even if her life is unbearable.

We walk through what is gentiley called the bathroom. Have you every seen your pet dog drink from an unflushed toilet? Well, the women here drink from unflushed toilets, too. For one thing, their water fountains are broken, and that is because, well you know, the same reason that people in ghettos may not take very good care of their property. Maybe for the same reasons, people at Palm Breeze don't take very good care of their property. So the water fountains are not working and many of the women are just crawling anyway. It's the easiest thing to drink out of the toilet. Dr. Boswell makes a big display of flushing all the toilets. But he knows that it won't really make any difference.

And the next ward, the next ward, the next ward...

Although by this time I am fully accepting of the humanity of the people around me, it is a bit abstract for me to call them sisters. For Mary it is not. Mary grew up with these people, and they probably had

more of a relationship of sisterhood than those of us outside Palm Breeze have with each other. They're the only family she's known. And she's interpreting all the while with her language and gestures to me. Dr. Boswell says that all the women are beautiful. I distrust his abstraction. Universal love can all too easily conceal. But who am I to say maybe he means it. If he means it though, he means it at some deep level, because it's hard for a woman to come through Palm Breeze and remain beautiful. Human yes, but physical beauty is one of the first things to go, and the naturalness combined with the awareness of self, which is beauty at a different level, goes at Palm Breeze too.

And finally, there is the hard core of the problem for which they were sent to Palm Breeze in the first place, the original insult, replicated and inflicted ever anew. The original insult was Downs Syndrome, cerebral palsy, hyperactivity, mental retardation. These women would have a scar to bear even if it were not for Palm Breeze. Palm Breeze has been salt. The society seems to take it out on those who can't fight for themselves. Pick on somebody your own size, I think. Usually the little finish last, if they finish. Life expectancy at Palm Breeze is reasonably low.

We say goodbye to Boswell. Mary leaves. I go with Pauline to a lunch appointment with one Arthur Goodman, outside expert on child welfare. I find myself in a dilemma. Earlier on the ward Boswell, having made a remark about hepatitis or something, washed his hands. Now it being time for lunch, I should wash my hands too, right? But not so easy. The germ theory is part of my scientific heritage which included Newtonian space and historical progress as well. But there is more to washing hands than washing away germs. At an earlier age I would not drink from a Coke

bottle which had been used by my friends. It took me a while to overcome that. These reflections on the germ theory are not irrelevant, nor are they idiosyncratic to me. Washing after all, to make the argument more cultural and less personal, is a part of religious ritual. Now by this time I have grown quite conscious of the fact that we were all afraid of catching that dreadful something, call it Palm Breeze disease; so here I am, faced with a decision made conscious by my reflections. Do I wash my hands or do I not wash my hands before eating? The reality of the situation is that sanitation at Palm Breeze is not all that good. Hepatitis, and who knows what else, could well have been exchanged in the hugs and hand-shaking of the morning. My hands are sticky from touching so many other sticky hands. Yet, on the other hand, I feel that I will be admitting that I am an outsider were I to wash my hands. Like Lady MacBeth I would be trying to wash my hands of Palm Breeze. It's probably the first time in my adult life that washing hands has become an act of concern.

I end up by washing my hands and reassuring myself that I'm not pretending to myself that I'm washing away any responsibility which I tell myself you can't do by washing your hands. I assure myself that washing my hands is related to the reality of the situation, but it's not all that easy to distinguish reality and nightmare.

Arthur Goodman is a slick young man with a future. He gives Pauline some sound counsel. Pauline is new at her job, and it is to her credit that she has asked for counsel. Arthur talks about the importance of the construction lobby in maintaining Palm Breeze. Everybody likes a monument. The building unions like to build; otherwise they face unemployment. It is good politics to build monuments. Those who like monuments built speak, those who live inside monuments cannot speak.

Arthur talks about the influence of the drug industry on Palm Breeze. The drug industry earns a lot of money from Palm Breezes. It is quite possible that Palm Breeze, like some other places that Arthur knows, permits a sort of experimentation which would be very expensive anywhere else. Thus Palm Breeze is a market and a laboratory for the drug industry. It is a market that makes experimentation profitable for a future expanded market which may include parts of our own society. The drug industry speaks politically. Those who swallow drugs do not.

With the older patients at Palm Breeze, those who have less hope about them, the attending staff became older, more rigid, and more sadistic. Arthur points out to me that the staff are as institutionalized as the residents of an institution. They work out ways of justifying their own position. They exploit the power relationships between them and the residents. All that is quite natural. Given the existence of the situation, what else could one expect? These attendants are unionized, and the union is not about to have any of them fired. The residents have no union.

So blame it on the construction lobby, the drug industry, the unions within Palm Breeze. Perhaps you want to blame it on the administration which runs Palm Breeze, an administration which I never saw while I was there. All of these things, although they have bearing on Palm Breeze, indeed a profound bearing, do not explain its existence. Why Palm Breeze?

We finish lunch and talk and we go outside. It's warm and spring is here. Arthur wants to see some children's buildings while he's at Palm Breeze. I go along.

It turns out that some of the conclusions I jumped to earlier are incorrect. I said that I saw no children playing on the grass. They are in point of fact a few dozen children on the grass. They're not

really playing, but they're on the grass. They're walking around in circles or sitting. Most other residents are outside on porches fenced in. I've jumped to a conclusion too fast. So forgive me, if you will, or throw out anything that I've said, if you will. Just don't throw out the reality of Palm Breeze.

Pauline, Arthur and I enter a complex of buildings united in one brilliant architectural coup into one building by a central superarchitectural educational core. We are in the children's building and Pauline made arrangements with a woman called Becca to show us around. I stay back, Arthur asks the questions, I listen and I look. Becca is a social worker. She's tough, compassionate, competent, black and young. As she talks to Arthur, her arms are folded in front of her and one leg sticks out--she is defiant; Arthur's machine gun questions give her no reason to change that attitude.

Becca leads the way into a ward. It needs paint. The beds are lined in rows. Most of them are empty because it is play period and, after all, it is daytime.

But of the forty or so beds lined up in the ward, six are occupied. One bed has in it a young boy with Downs Syndrome. He's rocking back and forth in his bed, and I never find out why he is in bed, he sure acts like he wants to get out.

In another bed is a boy with spina-bifida. We go over to talk with him. He is very articulate. A little girl in a wheelchair, nasty Alice, comes over and tries to molest him sexually. He pushes her away. My eyes pass a bed with a teddy bear in it, continue on, and then do a double take. It's not a teddy bear on the bed. It's a little, little child propped up and he or she is entirely motionless. This infant may

grow up to be like the naked woman whom I have seen in the ward that morning, the naked woman is a human being, if only by her size, posture and writhing. But a baby who has not developed, he or she looks like a bundle of cotton. There is none of the intentionality or acting by which we get our first cues that something is human. No particular matter; the more active children will soon learn to stop moving.

My eyes continue toward the bed I was originally looking at. There is a boy sitting on it moving back and forth in patterns which should be a code for something that I do not understand.

To the side of the ward space is a wall beyond which is a play area. I look in as Arthur talks with Becca and Pauline about the high probabilities of being able to find foster homes for these children. So why are they at Palm Breeze?

In the play area are three children and no toys. One little boy sits on the floor rocking back and forth. Another little boy is on a different piece of floor and he is doing nothing. A third little boy is wandering in rather precise circles. Off of this space is a play area fenced off from the outside. It is a sort of porch-like affair. There is very little play in the play area. Children appear to be isolated even though there are other children around. We might say that they are performing rituals, but for the children these rituals are much more imminent and seem to be a substitute for play. They're isolated, they don't play with each other and the attendants do not play with them or encourage play among themselves because they are just sitting against the wall talking among themselves.

I have been getting depressed and anxious about what I see over the wall. Finally I call Becca over and ask, "That child who is just lying on the floor, did he just lie on the floor when he came to Palm Breeze?"

Becca says, "No".

The perspective of the morning has changed sharply and painfully. It does not take eighteen years in Palm Breeze to learn how to be a catatonic. No, this lesson's rationality is quickly perceived by the youngest of children. Developing in what seems to us outside adults in an abnormal way is a perfectly rational adjustment to the abnormal world of the Palm Breeze institution. And this rationality is perceived incredibly early. It is not an aberration of our everyday rationality, modified to fit Palm Breeze, which would have been the case if the children had led normal childhoods, were put in Palm Breeze, and then learned to be masters of nothingness. The process of development itself is altered in fundamental ways at Palm Breeze. Action precedes thought says Piaget. From the very beginning, the children learn that the most appropriate action is inaction. What kind of thought can be modeled after inaction?

We leave the wards. We walk down a hallway and enter the occupational, physical, speech, educational therapy parts of the building. The atmosphere changes from gray to pictures painted on the wall. There are classrooms here much like Greta's. Arthur marvels at the difference a little paint can make. I wonder if the kids can see the difference or if it's only for the staff. Arthur points out that that may be irrelevant because it's important to keep staff morale high. He reminds me once again that the staff are also institutionalized. If the staff feels good about themselves, they'll get this across to the residents.

Greta's words come true now. She had said that kids during the time out of the class just sit and do nothing; I saw that five minutes ago. No class is about to start and these very same kids bounce, roll, ricochet

off the walls and they're happy, zipping into classrooms. Now they look like children. And they will be children, happy children, more or less happy that is, for about three or four hours.

After that they will go back to the wards.

I ask Becca "What is the effect on the child if the day is divided up into four hours of happiness like this and the rest is nothingness?"

Becca says, "I think it baffles them."

I ask Becca, "How old are the children when they stop going to school?"

Becca answers, "About 13."

I ask, "What happens then?"

Becca answers, "Their whole lives become like what you saw in the wards."

I mention the building I was in that morning and Becca knows it. And I ask, "Is that what becomes of their life? Is that their future?"

Becca answers, "Yes."

I ask, "Does that distress you?"

Becca answers, "Yes, that distresses me."

I say, "The people around here look very young and very concerned. I guess what I mean to say is that they look human." Becca nods in agreement. Becca is certainly young and dedicated and human. I've seen a lot of human beings during this day. But what happens later? What happens later in the lives of these young people after they've worked at Palm Breeze for a few years? What happens later in the lives of the children after they leave the care of these young people and start being looked at by attendants like the attendants I've seen in the ward during the morning?

I describe my fears and Becca agrees.

I ask, "What do you think the main problem is at Palm Breeze?"

Becca answers, "Understaffing."

Understaffing is certainly part of the problem. Your normal family has about one parent for every child and even if you're realistic about it and do not count fathers, there's one parent for every two children. What is the corresponding ratio at Palm Breeze? One adult for every twenty children. Very efficient.

But the problem is not merely one of staffing. I ask Becca why there isn't more staff and she doesn't know. Except for hiring, she's never met the people who appoint the staff.

We walk back down the hall into the gray zone. In a room off to our right a child is being wheeled under an oxygen tent. There is no doctor. I'm not even sure if there are nurses. What do you do when a normal child needs oxygen?

We linger by the door out of the building and thank Becca. Her arms hang loose by her sides now and her posture is friendly. I ask Becca "How do you feel about showing outsiders like us around Palm Breeze?"

Becca smiles and says "I'm used to tourists."

A moral lesson: "If man is born free but is everywhere in chains," as Rousseau says, then those chains can be forged at the earliest of ages. It does not take eighteen years, as I had thought, to make a Palm Breeze resident. A Palm Breeze resident can be cranked out in a matter of weeks. Socialization at Palm Breeze is rapid and efficient. Who says that personality change is a time-consuming endeavor? Palm Breeze is a model for changing attitudes, behavior, personality...choose your word. A prime showpiece, that's Palm Breeze.

A methodological analogy: Facts have a certain resemblance to children insofar as a fact without an adequate theory to disclose it is like a child without an adequate society in which to develop. (Like, for example, children in Palm Breeze.)

An aesthetic fact: The further you get from Palm Breeze, the more beautiful it looks.